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An Essay
on
Dysmenorrhœa.
By
William C. Warren
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Virginia

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Dysmenorrhea

It is the office of the uterus to secrete and discharge at regular periods a peculiar fluid. When this discharge is painful and attended with much pain and difficulty, it is termed Dysmenorrhea.

Notwithstanding the importance of this disease with regard to the healthy economy of the female, medical writers have paid but little attention to it. Dr Cullen was the first that noticed it particularly, and to him we are indebted for its history and treatment. Dr Fitzgibbon has spoken of it regularly & Cullen has merely given it a place in his first class. Dr Denman was the first who considered organized substances as constituting a part of this disease, though he has offered no explan-

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nation of the formation of that substance. In every case of habitual painful menstruation, he thinks this membrane is expelled.

Of late, two interesting papers on this subject have been written by Drs Chapman and Dewees. Their opinions, always entitled to respect, are calculated to remove much of the obscurity with which it has heretofore been surrounded. They adopt the theory of secretion, which has generally been ascribed to the celebrated Hunter; and believe the membrana decidua exists in almost every case of obstinate and long continued Amenorrhœa. Dr. D. has gone into a very ingenious detail of the fabrication of the membrane: he supposes the process of secretion is merely to divest the blood of the power of coagulating, from the fact, that coagulation does take place when there is uterine derangement, and that in health it is never the case.

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He therefore makes coagulation a test of the unhealthy action of the Uterus. When the functions of this viscus then are performed imperfectly, the Lymph does not undergo a modification, but is thrown into the cavity of the Uterus, possessing the power of separation and of coagulation. As the fluid is poured gradually into the Uterus, it has time to separate into its constituent parts. The red globules from their greater weight and density, will leave the unsubdued coagulating lymph, and fall to the bottom of the Uterus and sooner or later be discharged; while the Lymph spreading itself over the internal surface of the Uterus, soon assumes the appearance of membrane, as is usual with it when in contact with living parts.

This membrane will be, to all intents and purposes, an extraneous substance to the Uterus; and will sooner or later urge it to contraction

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to throw it off; which contractions will be painful like those of labor: hence the pain in this kind of menstruation.

Whether this view is correct, is a matter of specu=lation. But, that the vessels of the Uterus, which pour out the catamenia are the instruments by which the decidua is formed, there is no doubt. And it is equally true, that while they are engaged either in the formation or support of this new production, menstruation ceases.

Causes.

The remote causes of this disease, it would be difficult to assign. The most common, are cold ap=plied during the evacuation of the menses; taking cold after abortion; and sometimes it has followed the consummation of marriage.* This latter cause is difficult of explanation.

Symptoms.

This disease usually attacks those who are pre=

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disposed or obnoxious to it, and commences with a slight menstruous discharge, which in a short time suddenly ceases, and the woman instantly experiences violent pain; described by her as forcing down and returning at longer or shorter intervals, till a membranous substance or small coagula are discharged; sometimes small and at other times large and resembling the cavity of the Uterus in shape. After this substance is expelled, the woman enjoys ease, unlep there be a fresh production to stimulate another effort in the Uterus for its expulsion. Several days are sometimes spent before these efforts cease and at other times only a few hours are required. The degree of pain is not in proportion to the quantity of membrane; as sometimes a small portion is discharged after a great deal of suffering, and a large portion may be thrown off without producing as much uneasinep. Besides the alternate pains, there is generally a distreping ach=

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ing in the back and hips, which almost invariably announces the approach of the period. In some instances this continues for several days. The sufferings at the menstrual period are sometimes so severe, that they resemble in intensity the pains of labor or abortion.

There appear to be two distinct states of this affection — one where the mammæ sympathise with the Uterus and become tumid and oftentimes extremely painful; the other where no such affection is induced. In the management of these two conditions, the one accompanied with pain is thought least difficult.

Treatment —

Assuming it as a principle, that menstruation is a secretory process, and that this disease depends upon a perversion of the healthy action of the Uterus, our remedies must be first directed to the relief of pain, and secondly, to restore

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healthy action. the first of these indications is met by opium and Ipecac in the form of dover's powder; or camphor and opium; the warm bath; fomentations to the region of the Uterus; and if the patients sufferings are very intense, 100 drops of laudanum may be injected into the rectum. When there is inflammatory diathesis, venesection is always essential and should never be omited. Of the opium and camphor, Dr. Chapman speaks with much confidence, which is the result of his own practice. Administered in the proportion of two grains of the first article, to ten of the latter has seldom failed in his hands. Dr. Dewees recommends the following formula.

℞ Gum Camphor ʒj
Sp. Vin. Rect. q.s. f. pulv. Add
Sac. Alba. q.s. & Gum Arab ℥j
Aqua. Cinna. Simp. ℥j - Mis.

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this draught is to be given; and if not relieved in an hour or two, the residue should be exhibited. In all cases, this quantity is not sufficient to subdue pain, and the mixture should be repeated; or the same quantity of camphor may be finely powdered and given in ten grain doses every hour, until relief is procured. Should the stomach be so deranged as to bear nothing upon it, and this sometimes is the case, thirty or forty grains of camphor ought to be rubbed down with a few drops of the spirits of wine, to a very fine powder, ʒj of Laudanum, and ʒiij of thin starch or flaxseed tea, and used as an injection. If this be too suddenly discharged, it may be repeated. The Ergot from its affinity to the Uterus, would seem to afford us here an invaluable remedy, for besides the specific effects exerted by it on that organ, its action is almost instantaneous, but still our expectations are not met

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by it in this disease. Its efficacy is only confined to those cases where the decidua exists, and though cures have been effected with it, many respectable Authorities think its claims to our notice very slender.

The remedies next presenting themselves are those used during the interval of the attacks, to produce such a change, as will prevent a return, by doing away that state of the Uterus on which this disease depends, and establishing a new action. I will first mention the Polygala Senega as demanding our attention, in those cases where the interruption depends on a membrane. All who are familiar with the effects of this medicine upon the system, must have perceived how actively it promotes the various secretory discharges. It would seem then peculiarly adapted to Dysmenorrhœa, as it would appear obvious, that both a forcible

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and specific impression should be made on the Uterus, to excite it to a secretory effort. To Dr. Hartshorne is due the credit of introducing into practice the Senecka. Dr. Chapman immediately gave it a fair and extensive trial, and from his success, is warranted in recommending it as one of the most active Emmenagogues. It may be administered either in powder or decoction, but the latter mode is prefered. Of the decoction, about four ounces should be given during the day, or more or less according to the circumstances of the case. At the time however when the menstrual effort is expected to be made, and till the discharge is induced, the dose should be increased as far as the stomach will bear. Sometimes as much as two ounces every hour may be taken. Should the medicine excite nausea, combine with it orange peel, cinnamon,

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In the time between the menstrual periods, the medicine should be laid aside for a week or two, as without these intermissions, if it does not lose its power, it becomes nauseous and disgusting to the patient. While under such a course, the system should always be attended to, equally obviating excessive excitement or debility by the use of appropriate remedies.

In the exhibition of remedies to prevent a recurrence of pain, the Volatile Tincture of Guaiacum is recommended with a confidence that could scarcely only to be derived from success, by Dr Dewes. Whilst on the other hand, Dr. James, whose extensive practice has afforded him many opportunities of witnessing its effects, has seen no advantage from its use. The mode of using it is, a teaspoonful every morning, noon, and evening, in a wine glass ful of sweetened milk, or when not forbidden by some peculiarity or circumstance, as

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much white wine, as Sherry, Teneriffe or Madeira. The dose must be gradually increased in those cases where a perseverance beyond four or five weeks becomes necessary. It is necessary sometimes to continue the use of it several months. If this medicine should disturb the bowels too much, a few drops of Laudanum must be added to each dose; but if on the contrary they should not be sufficiently opened, the addition of a little resin of Jalap or powdered Rhubarb will be an improvement.-

Dr. D's formula - ℞ Pulv. Gum Guaiacum ℥iv
Carb. Soda vel Potash. ℥iss
Pulv. Pimento — ℥j
Alcohol diluted lbj

Digest for a few days, and add the Volatile Spirit of Sal. Ammoniac pro. re nata. in the proportion of a dracham or two to every four ounces

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of tincture; or a larger or smaller quantity agreeably to circumstances. Greater advantage is to be expected, when the first menstrual period after commencing the use of it is more than usually severe. This therefore may be considered a favorable sign.

The Extract of cicuta, the Tincture of Cantharides, and the Madder root, have all been used successfully in this disease.

The Black Hellebore was long since introduced as an emmenagogue by Meade, and recommended by him in the strongest terms. Its use was suspended by the opinion of Cullen, who pronounced it to be a feeble and uncertain remedy; but is again revived, and is thought to have many just pretentions to the reputation it formerly possessed. In painful menstruation, attended with torpor and constipation of the bowels, and, perhaps with some degree of in=

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sensibility in the Uterus, it is especially useful when it purges.

As a remedy from which we may expect advantage when all others have failed; I will mention mercury. It is a fact well known, that no medicine in the Materia Medica has such a specific effect on the secretories; and whenever those organs become deranged, to that medicine we look for correction; therefore in the most obstinate cases of this disease, a moderate salivation kept up for several weeks, will often produce the happiest effects. A case came under my observation, of a young Lady aged 16. who had her menses suddenly checked by alarm during the discharge. At each succesive period for several months, the flow was small, and accompanied with much suffering; she then became subject to the most violent paroxysms of Hysteria. After trying a variety of

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remedies without succes, her Physician determined to resort to mercury; as soon as ptyalism was excited there was evident change in her mind and feelings, and since that time, the Uterus has performed its functions with perfect regularity, and the lady is entirely restored to health. It was impossible to ascertain whether any membrane was expelled, as the cloths could not be examined, and the accounts of the attendants unsatisfactory.

Why should not the Nitro Muriatic Acid prove an efficient remedy in this disease? As a promoter of secretions it is thought by many to be only inferior to mercury, and is used not only as an auxiliary to that metal in several diseases, but is also frequently substituted for it. Dr. Scott who first used the acid, applied it very extensively to practice; he says "It appears in a peculiar manner to effect the glands and alter their secretions."

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From the analogy then between this and many of the other medicines used in Dysmenorrhœa, it is fair to infer its utility. Used either internally or as a bath, the same effects are produced.

In this disease attention should always be paid to the bowels, using laxatives if they are costive. As an external application blisters applied to the back and thighs will be found highly advantageous, by inviting a determination to the Uterine vessels.

The married and single woman are alike liable to this disease, and whilst it continues they are anxious and unhappy; and what renders these cases still more interesting is the influence exerted on the generative power. Unless this wrong action is changed, the woman will rarely become a mother.

ΙΠΠΟΚΡΑΤΕΣ